

THE MENTOR

"A Wise and Faithful Guide and Friend"

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No. 16

AMERICAN BIRDS OF BEAUTY

BLUE JAY

BALTIMORE ORIOLE

CEDAR WAXWING

SCARLET TANAGER

WOOD DUCK

SNOWY HERON

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WE are accustomed to think of the tropics as the home of birds of graceful forms and brilliant plumage; but North America can boast of many birds that will compare not unfavorably with some of their lustrous cousins of the equatorial regions. There are in this country many birds of beauty which have long been a theme of song and story, and some of the best known are illustrated here.

THE BLUE JAY

"A bird so beautiful as the blue jay must be very rare now in your country," said a titled Englishman to a friend of mine who was traveling in the "tight little island."

The blue jay, though unprotected by law in many states, and considered fair game for the gunner, is still a common bird over a great part of North America.

Everywhere the jays have a bad name. The blue jay in particular is looked upon as a noisy, quarrelsome rascal; but he is a gay buccaneer withal, and so handsome that his faults are often forgiven. Also,

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BLUE JAY

Some comrade blue jay whistles, and he is up and away, his feathers sleeked and wet from his hunting among the damp leaves.

break strong dead twigs from the limb of some standing tree, and on this foundation the nest is placed.

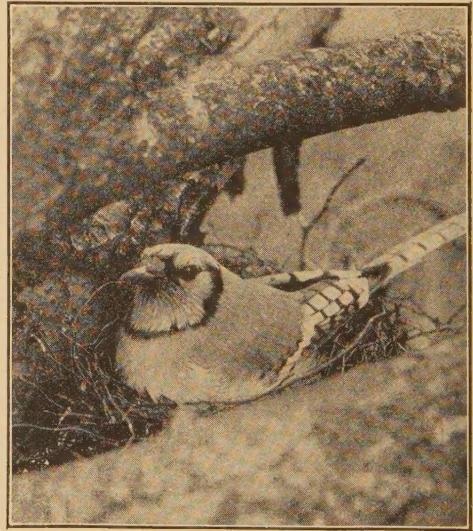
When the eggs are laid the noisy jay becomes silent and discreet. He does not advertise his home with staccato cries, like the robin, but glides silently to the lower branches of the tree, and hops from limb to limb round the trunk, watching on all sides, perhaps to see if the coast is clear, but going higher all the while, until he has climbed his spiral stairway, and reached the nest on which his partner sits awaiting the morsel he politely tenders her.

The screams of the jay are harsh, yet musical. His voice has the timbre of a trumpet,—a cold, clear, metallic sound,—and his call to arms

he has virtues of his own. If he sometimes steals corn and robs the nests of little birds, still he is a premium caterpillar hunter. A single family of jays, it is said, destroy a million caterpillars in a season; but the jay's good qualities are not well known, and he is hunted by mankind without mercy, escaping only by his ready wits.

The jay is normally a forest bird, his home the somber pines; but he quickly adapts himself to circumstances, and places his nest anywhere for safety.

The nest is built largely of twigs; but in laying its foundation the knowing bird is not content with picking up the fragile, half-rotten sticks of the forest floor, but works with might and main, using both bill and feet, to



BLUE JAY ON NEST

When the eggs are laid the noisy jay becomes a silent and watchful bird.

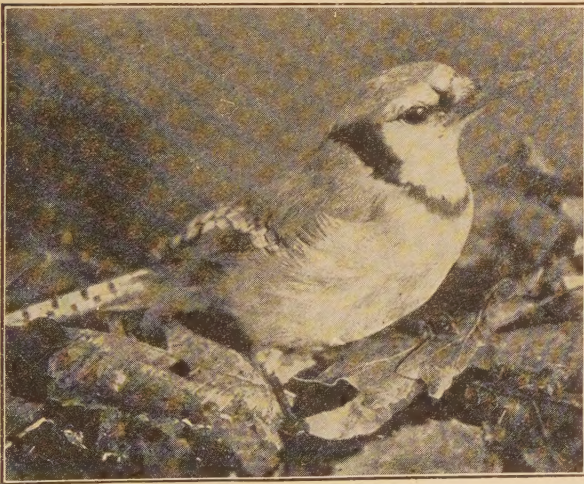
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quickly arouses the whole eager clan. Now they have found a drowsy owl in a thick pine top. The woods ring again with their trumpet chorus, and blue flashes to blue as they converge to the attack. Here they come from all directions. Fuss and feathers indeed! In the excitement of the affray they lose their habitual caution, and you expect to see the noisy mob annihilate the little gray owl; but after half an hour of ceaseless clamor and attack hardly a feather of the drowsy one seems to have been ruffled. He never bats an eye; but sits in the midst of the clamor with his head sunk between his shoulders, apparently somnolent. The onset consists mainly of bluff and bluster—and he knows it.

Next their arch enemy, the sharp-shinned hawk, is the object of their enmity, and he sometimes suffers them to mob him with impunity; but let them not venture to provoke the little pirate too far, for then, with a sudden rush, he strikes one of the mocking crew and bears him to the ground, when, although the stricken victim fights to the last gasp, the hearts of his companions turn to water and they fly screaming away. Theirs is only mob courage, after all, and a stout heart soon daunts them.

The brilliant jay takes the very best care of his precious skin; yet he will fight for his helpless young, and in defense of them becomes invincible.

Jays are sociable creatures and fond of their companions. There is a story told of one that became blind, but was led, tended, and fed for months by his solicitous companions.



BLUE JAY

Watch a blue jay on the ground hunting under the leaves for nuts and insects. Now he stops the pitchfork work of his strong bill to listen.

Few people who know the blue jay and its common cries even suspect that as a song-bird it is secretly a brilliant performer. Commonly it imitates the scream of the red-shouldered hawk so closely that only the trained ear can detect the difference, and it has a remarkable faculty of imitating many other birds. Let none despise the musical powers of the jay; for certain individuals are greatly gifted, and the only reason this is not more generally known is that our modest performer warbles

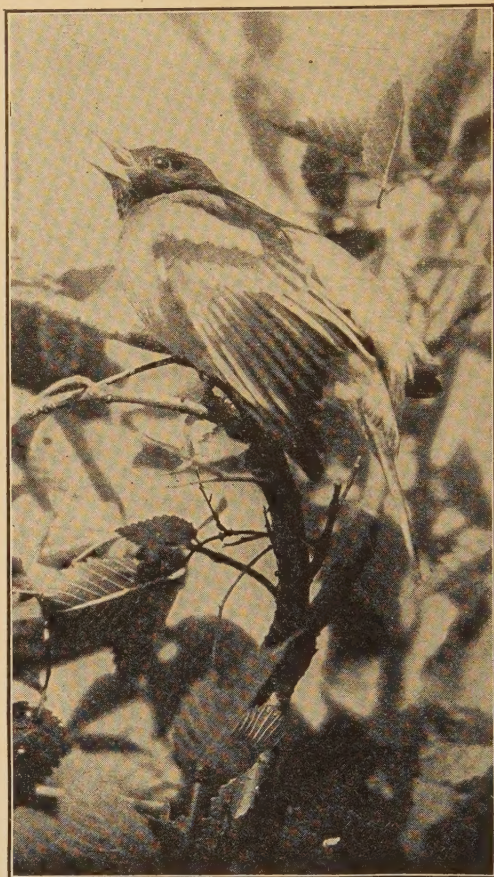
as softly as "any sucking dove" and apparently sings when he believes no one is near. I have heard its supreme vocal effort only a few times, and it was no mean performance.

Jays, like crows, are fond of hearing their own voices. When the frost has opened the chestnut burs they are supremely happy. With a hole in a tree or a cavity behind a strip of bark to fill with nuts or corn, the prudent jay lays up a store of provisions against the time when the ground will be covered with snow. Later, as autumn wanes, the call of the jay seems to take on a sadder tone, like the plaint of some forest elf wandering sadly 'mid falling leaves and mourning the decay of the season.

THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE

When Alexander Wilson, the "Father of American Ornithology," described and figured the firebird, hangbird, or golden robin of our fathers, he called it the Baltimore oriole. A tradition still lingers in Maryland to the effect that George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, who wrote the charter for what is now Maryland, discouraged by the trials and rigors of his Newfoundland colony, visited Virginia in 1628, where he found flocks of orioles, and was so cheered by their song and beauty that he adopted their colors, orange and black, for his own. As he took the oriole's colors, the oriole later took his name.

Elegant in form, beautiful in plumage, and a fine singer, the Baltimore bird has always been a favorite, and has gone on cheering and charming mankind to this day. Its swinging nest is one of the finest specimens of bird architecture, and is commonly hung from the drooping branch of a great elm overhanging farmhouse or village street. In



BALTIMORE ORIOLE

A beautiful bird and a fine singer—also a bird of great courage. He has been known to defeat red squirrels in conflict.

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May the happy, mated pair begin their domicile, looping strings, strands, or hair over the pendent branchlets, each one fastened from twig to twig in the form of a swing. Both birds bring material, and the female works the material together until a pouch is formed to contain the nest lining. In some cases the nest is roofed over until a long, deep, gourd-shaped bag is formed, with a small entrance hole in one side. In the Gulf States the pouch is sometimes built of Spanish moss in loose, open fashion; but in the North it is woven firmly and the nest is warmly lined. Usually the little home swings high, safe from the attacks of predatory animals, a veritable castle in the air. Some kindly people hang upon shrub or fence a stock of colored yarns for the orioles, and watch daily the construction of the resultant gaudy nest. Once I found a black nest built almost entirely of horsehair. The mother bird exhibits extreme devotion to her newly hatched young. In one case she remained on the nest and defended them until the limb was sawed off and the nest taken into a house.



NEST OF BALTIMORE ORIOLE

The young orioles may be seen above the hanging nest.

Through the spring and summer days the wild, free notes of the oriole ring out among the elms of the countryside. Usually they are recognizable by their peculiar quality; but a particularly talented performer now and then appears. Last year near my home a gifted bird rang the changes constantly on C, E, and G major in several different combinations extending over an entire octave. The notes rang like a bugle call.

As with most brilliantly plumaged birds, the male is far more brightly colored than the female, and as in other species the plumage grows brighter and more perfect for three or more years. An old male's breast sometimes shows a deep, rich, luminous orange that rivals the bright scarlet of the tanger.

The cheery oriole is one of the farmer's best friends; for it continually destroys caterpillars, weevils,

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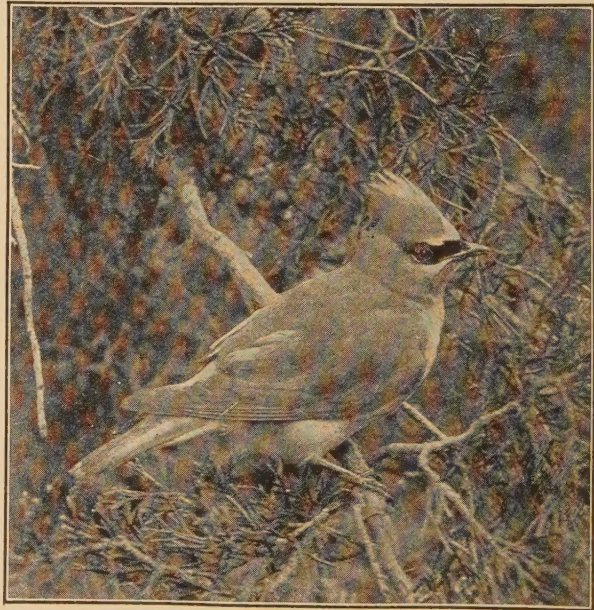
and many injurious beetles, and it does little harm to any crop. So we see the oriole is useful as well as ornamental.

THE CEDAR WAXWING

At any season, in almost any part of the country, you may see a flock of curious little birds flying in easy, slightly undulating fashion to alight compactly on some nearby tree. You have made the acquaintance of the cedar waxwing, a hardy bird, which winters in the Northern States in many localities where it can feed on the berries of the red cedar or Virginia juniper. Hence its name.

The waxwing is not a bird of brilliant plumage. It is rather quaker-like in garb; but, though a trifle odd and peculiar, its appearance is extremely elegant and refined, giving the bird an air of distinction. Its principal charm lies in its graceful shape and its silky plumage, with its marvelous melting browns and drabs, changing insensibly from one lovely tint to another. On this modest background bits of black, white, red, and yellow are tastefully disposed like the trimmings of a garment. No painting can do justice to the satiny sheen and texture of its feathers and soft blending of the different colors. No other family of birds has similar waxlike appendages at the ends of the quills. They look like bits of bright red sealing wax, and science has not discovered their use. Probably they are more ornamental than useful.

This bird of beauty has an unenviable reputation. It is a irrepressible little gormand. A fruit grower told me that individuals ate of his cherries until so satiated that they fell from the tree and could be taken in the hand, and Audubon says that birds of this species, kept in confinement, dined so heartily upon apples that they died of suffocation. The waxwing is a well known enemy of the cherry grower. Its digestion



CEDAR WAXWING

The waxwing often makes its nest in an orchard. It shows great devotion to its young.

AMERICAN BIRDS OF BEAUTY

is so rapid that fruit has passed its entire digestive tract in less than half an hour. The greater part of the fruit it eats, however, is valueless to mankind, and as its huge appetite is largely satisfied on insects known as destructive pests, it is ranked as one of the birds beneficial to agriculture. It feeds on cankerworms, caterpillars, elm-leaf beetles, potato beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, moths, bugs, bark lice, and scale insects.

Like some other plump and well fed personages, the waxwing is good natured, happy, affectionate, and blessed generally with a good disposition. It is fond of good company, and is very considerate of its companions. Sometimes a little group may be observed resting together in a row, billing and caressing. If one of them secures a tempting morsel, like a luscious cherry or a plump insect, he may be seen to pass it on to his neighbor, which in turn presents it to the next, until it has passed up and down the line more than once, before it is accepted.

"So," says Dr. Coues, "they lead their idle, uneventful lives, these debonair birds,—sociable but not domestic, even a trifle dissipated, good natured to a friend in a scrape, very reliable diners out, and fond of showing off their dressy topknots, on which so much of their mind is fixed."

THE SCARLET TANAGER

No other North American bird can compare with the male scarlet tanager in massed brilliance of pure color. He flashes through the light green leaves of early spring like a brand of tropical flame, his encrimsoned body contrasting sharply with wings and tail as black as night,—a common bird, yet so rarely seen by most people that the sight makes a lasting impression upon the mind.

It is May. In the deep woods of oak and chestnut we hear a clear, warbling whistle, a trifle strident in parts, sounding somewhat like a hoarse robin's song. Follow the song, and you may find the singer, but not at once, as our



A YOUNG CEDAR WAXWING

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bird is a ventriloquist. His song rings here and there, now near, now far, while the listener vainly cranes his neck in search of the musician, who sits quietly in a nearby treetop, hidden among the green leaves.

So people have come to believe that the tanager is a rare bird; while in reality it is common in the woods, especially during the spring migration. When the song is hushed you may sometimes find the bird by startling him with a sudden noise, a shout, or a loud clapping of the hands. Then the alarm note *chip-churr*, often repeated, may lead you to him or to his modestly colored mate.

The tanager is not confined altogether to the woods, and at times nests in the orchards. The nest is rather loosely built, and is set on the branch of a tree from five to fifty feet from the ground.



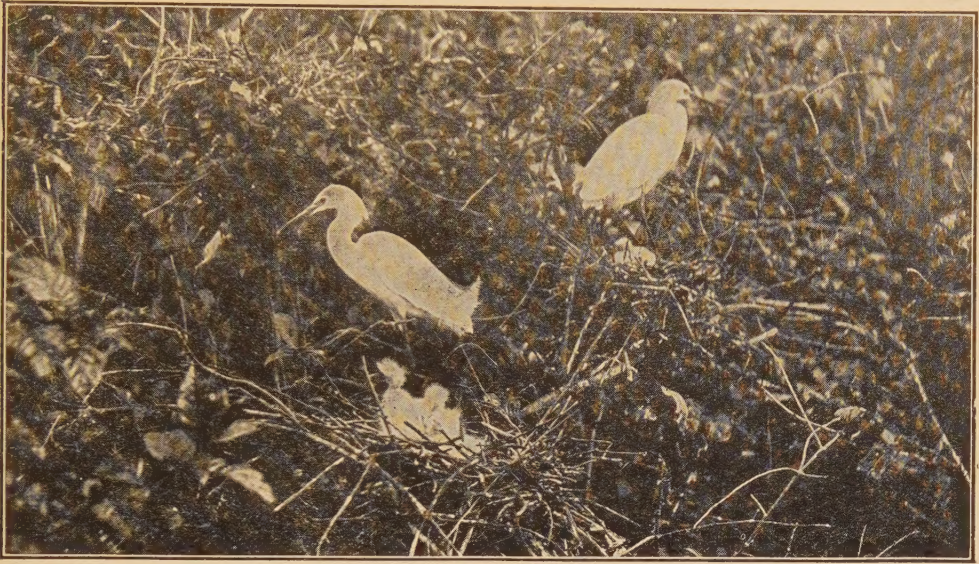
SCARLET TANAGER NEST

The gorgeous scarlet tanager who sang in this tree was killed by a slingshot. The nest was deserted by his terrified mate.

Our black-winged redbird is very devoted to its young, and will sometimes risk its life in their defense. A little one that had fallen from a nest was picked up and taken to a farmhouse half a mile away; but its parents found it there and contrived to feed it through the bars of its cage. The tanager loves to dwell within the shade of tall white oaks, where it constitutes itself the guardian of these trees. It feeds constantly on the insects of the oak and chestnut, and very few of these pests escape its sharp and roving eye. I have seen a tanager take in a short time every caterpillar from a shrub that had swarmed with them. Its beauty, song, and usefulness should endear the tanager to all mankind.

THE SNOWY HERON

It was one of the privileges of my early days, during an expedition to Florida, to see much of the wonderful flora and fauna of that semitropical peninsula before the woodman's ax, the hunter's gun, and the



SNOWY HERONS

But a few diminishing colonies of these beautiful birds now remain in our country.

fisherman's net had robbed the lands and waters of much of their luxuriant life. In those days flocks of snowy herons and egrets gladdened the eye throughout a large part of the Gulf States.

Late one afternoon, as I lay concealed beneath the roots of a large mangrove, a flock of snowy herons alighted about a dark and sunken pool before me, and there, within from ten to thirty feet of my hiding place, the graceful birds strutted about, displaying their raised crests and lovely, spraylike plumes against the background of the black and slimy ooze. Snowy white, immaculate, they passed and repassed one another, bowing and turning as they swept about exhibiting their stately beauties; for it was the mating season. I never expect to see the like again; for the curse of the feather trade has fallen like a blight upon all plume birds, and where millions once inhabited a great part of our country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, now only a few diminishing colonies remain.

The snowy heron or lesser egret is the smaller of the white egrets of America. It is a useful bird; for, notwithstanding the fact that, like all herons, it feeds to some extent on fish and frogs, grasshoppers, cutworms and other injurious insects enter largely into its bill of fare. During most of the year it is a plain, plumeless white heron; but in the mating season it bears on its back the beautiful sprays known to fashion as aigrettés. At nesting time the white birds gather in colonies in some more or less inaccessible swamp and build their loosely constructed nests,

usually in bushes or trees. Each nesting female lays three to five bluish eggs, and hatches them by the heat of her body. When the eggs have hatched and the parent birds are employed in feeding their crying young, the plume hunter sees his opportunity. The plumes are now at their best, and the fond parents, caring for their little ones, fearlessly expose themselves to the aim of the vandal hidden in the undergrowth beneath their nests. He shoots the parents, leaves the young to starve in the nests—and thus My Lady gets her plumes.

The ever-diminishing hosts of the egrets in every land rapidly are nearing extinction. The few pitiful remnants in the United States are guarded mainly by wardens employed by the Audubon societies.

Nevertheless, the sad story of the egrets may yet have a brighter sequel. It remained for Edward A. McIlhenny of Louisiana to show how these birds may be preserved. Years ago, when the plumers had shot out the heronries in his neighborhood, he saved a few of the starving young, which he kept in a cage near his house. He fed them well, and when they were fully fledged, he liberated them. They flew away. The next spring they returned, mated, and built their nests in the trees near a little pool where stood their old home, the cage. The birds increased in numbers year by year, and now there are thousands of egrets, perfectly tame, well protected, and nesting on Mr. McIlhenny's grounds within sight of his factory. It is to be hoped that, with the protection of law, it may be possible again to restock the country with these graceful and useful creatures.

THE WOOD DUCK

Peerless in beauty among waterfowl of the world stands our wood duck. Dame Nature has turned out few more beautiful creatures. The changing lusters of its wondrous plumage, flashing in the sunlight, are the despair of the artist and a delight to all eyes. Every color of the rainbow, with deeper and brighter tints, and many a changing iridescence robe the lovely bird, until it appears a feast and riot of color among the reflections of the limpid forest pools in which it proudly sails, like an exquisitely proportioned little barge decorated with the gems of the Orient.

The wood duck was formerly the most abundant waterfowl in many wooded regions of North America, from the southern forests of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Audubon saw them in flocks of hundreds. Dr. Hatch, writing of Minnesota in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, says that in the spring they came like the rains of the tropics, and poured in until every pool in the woodlands was deluged by them. In Ohio they were killed by wagonloads fifty years ago. Even in eastern Massachusetts they were so plentiful that old hunters still living tell of the

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killing of fifty or sixty by one man in a morning. With the coming of the white man this duck adapted its habits to the changing conditions, and often built its nest in a hollow apple tree or in some cavity in an elm above a farmhouse door. Nesting from time immemorial in hollow trees, it was always at home in the woods, and it still pursues its devious flight among the branches of the forest as easily as a passenger pigeon.

The nest is warmly lined with down and feathers, with which the mother bird, when leaving, covers the eggs to keep life in them while she is away. Returning, she flies directly and unerringly into the entrance of her little home, striking upon the feathers of her breast and landing so lightly as never to injure her cherished treasures.

When the little ones have hatched and dried their natal down, they seek the water. Accounts vary as to how they get there. Some observers claim to have seen the young riding to the water on the back of the flying mother; others aver that she carries them one by one in her bill; others that she takes them with her feet; and still others claim to have seen her push them out of the nest, whence they fluttered or fell lightly to the grass or leaves below, and were then led to the water. If the nesting tree overhangs the flood, the downy ones launch into the air and, spreading their little wings and feet, drop upon the surface. It is probable that the procedure varies; but this much seems sure,—the young are often taken to the water in the bill of the parent; for many people have seen it. The wood-duck feeds mainly on water plants and woodland products, such as acorns, chestnuts, and beech nuts, or on insects, tadpoles, and other small forms of aquatic life. Beautiful, interesting, harmless, and useful, it deserves a better fate than extermination at the hands of man.



WOOD DUCK

From a drawing by L. A. Fuertes.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING



Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America	<i>Frank M. Chapman</i>
Birdcraft	<i>Mabel Osgood Wright</i>
Birds of America	<i>J. J. Audubon</i>
Bird Neighbors	<i>Neltje Blanchan</i>
Key to North Ameri- can Birds	<i>Elliot Coues</i>
Handbook of Birds of Western United States .	<i>Florence Merriam Bailey</i>



QUESTIONS ANSWERED

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American Birds of Beauty



BLUE JAY

Monograph Number One in The Mentor Reading Course



WHEN Mark Twain wrote his famous story of the jay attempting to fill a hole in a cabin roof with acorns, he portrayed the bird with rare accuracy. Few more humorous sketches of bird life have ever been written, and the jay's curiosity and astonishment at finding the hole apparently not fillable are remarkably true to life. One of the blue jay's strongest traits is curiosity, and he may be called away from acorn gathering by simply drawing a breath in sharply against the back of the hand.

If this were his worst vice we could admire his jaunty manner and brilliant shades of blue without misgivings; but the darker crime of nest robbing is laid at his door. Yet in the spring and summer he does much to atone for his faults by destroying great numbers of grubs and harmful insects. And when he comes boldly around the farmhouse in winter, his azure coat giving a touch of alluring color to the sunny background, we forget his shortcomings.

Belonging to the crow family, he joins in its feud against owls, and right royally does he uphold his end. Follow up the next excited jay convention you hear in the woods, and you will probably find the flood of billingsgate directed at an owl, visibly annoyed at the attention he is receiving. The screech owl is their usual victim, and more rarely the great horned owl. The tormentors seem to understand their enemies' helplessness in daylight. The larger owl appears impassive; but sometimes the smaller one is goaded into attempts at reprisal. These attacks are easily eluded by the active jays, and their tantalizing does not cease until the night pirate has slipped into hiding among evergreens or a convenient hole in a tree.

The jay can be trained by patience, and makes a very interesting pet, although if given too much freedom he is likely to cause annoyance by stealing any article that attracts his fancy.

An ever-present and vociferous feature of the landscape during most of the year, along in April the jays apparently disappear. You no longer hear their clear "pe-to" over the trees and fields. Search for them then in the treetops, and if your quest is successful you will find the young cavalier transformed into a silent and vigilant guardian of a rather bulky nest, tucked away among the thick branches of a cedar perhaps. The olive-green eggs are carefully tended, and the parental instinct is sufficiently strong to eliminate temporarily any inclination toward stealing and devastation.





American Birds of Beauty



BALTIMORE ORIOLE

Monograph Number Two in The Mentor Reading Course



HEERILY—cheerily—cheerily”—a clear, rollicking whistle from the elm, drooping over a roadway, along which speeds a steady procession of automobiles. There he goes, a flashing streak of flame and black, and soon returns with a long strip of slender bark trailing behind his widespread tail. A site for the new nest has been selected in the same tree, where hangs last year's pendant domicile, and both birds are hard at work home-building. The lady of the house, in her demure dress of dull, yellowish green, works steadily and quietly, while her resplendent lord, bedecked in orange and black, cannot restrain his joy, pausing between billfuls of nesting material to voice his happiness in song.

The Baltimore oriole has been quick to realize the friendly attitude of man, returning year after year to the same locality. Nearly all parks of the country contain one or more pairs, and because of the safe location of the deep basket nest on the extreme end of a pendulous branch where it cannot be despoiled by cat or squirrel, they rear their young safely. Though this is undoubtedly a factor in the struggle for survival of the species, in many individual instances it would not be necessary; for the oriole is a bird of splendid courage. Red squirrels have been badly beaten in attempts to despoil an approachable nest; and cats have been driven from the tree by the sharp thrusts of a needle-like bill.

Watch a pair at work building, and the perfect adaptability of these two for weaving their curious nests will be understood. In and out goes the long, thin back thread, interwoven with odd bits of string, stray horsehairs, or any bit of suitable stuff that strikes their fancy. They even attack raveling ends of sheets or towels hung out on washday to dry. An interesting test of the oriole's eye for color can be made by hanging within their reach varicolored skeins of wool. The bird always selects the more inconspicuous colors: bright reds or yellows remain where they are hung. When their nest is complete, man would find imitation almost impossible. Frail as they seem, many of them endure the storms of several winters before falling from the branches.

Along in July the birds retire from observation and undergo the annual molt, to reappear in early August. At this time the males continue to sing; although much less blithely than when they first come in the spring. They attack and destroy caterpillars of a kind that many other birds refuse to touch. The Department of Agriculture credits them with thirty-four per cent. caterpillar diet. They do not eat the entire caterpillar, but tear it apart and select a small portion. An oriole has been seen to destroy seventeen of these pests in exactly one minute. Had he attempted to eat the entire anatomy, five or six of the morsels would have sufficed for a meal.



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American Birds of Beauty



CEDAR WAXWING

Monograph Number Three in The Mentor Reading Course



WHAT the cedar waxwing lacks in voice he makes up in dress. Though the hues are not brilliant, they are so exquisitely blended that these birds are among the most beautiful we have. Exactly what use the curious waxlike appendages on the ends of the secondaries are for is not known. More rarely similar formations are found on the tail feathers.

These gipsies of the bird world roam indiscriminately over the country, and are quite as likely to be found calmly enjoying the hawthorn berries in December as they are to be seen gorging themselves with June cherries. They fit perfectly into the winter landscape, and a cluster of wild cherry trees in summer would hardly seem complete without a flock of waxwings among the branches. Their mannerisms are notably different from the majority of birds, possessing few of the quick, nervous motions of the others.

The next time that you discover a flock of cedar waxwings among the cherries do not run for a gun, but get a fieldglass instead. See how dignified and polite they are even in feeding. No pushing aside to get the biggest mouthful. With a gentle inclination of the crested brown head, one seems to say, "After you are served I will take a bite or two; but not before—no, indeed!"

It is a short-sighted farmer who begrudges this perfect little Beau Brummel the fruit he takes. The wages they exact are far below what is due them for the thousands of canker worms, moths, and bugs they destroy. A flock of waxwings in the orchard when the codling moths are secreting themselves in the calyxes of young apples will accomplish more good in the same time than two men.

In common with the goldfinch, the waxwing does not think of nest building until all other birds have reared a family. Not until July do they select a home site—maybe in the orchard or more probably in the edge of second-growth woods. The structure is rather lightly put together. The pale bluish eggs are curiously marked with brown spots. Both birds are devoted parents. A visitor to the nest is received almost as though expected. They sit quietly, with scarcely a protest, during the inspection, never for a moment ceasing to show that strange reserve and debonair manner so characteristic of the species. "We have no objection to your looking at our treasures; but please remember a gentleman does not disturb the property of others," they seem to say. Lost indeed to all sense of fair play would be the man who could break up such a home!

The only other representative of the genius is the bohemian waxwing, found in the more northern parts of the country. It is a trifle larger bird; but could easily be mistaken for the common waxwing. A dusky throat and deep cinnamon under tail feathers are the distinguishing marks.





American Birds of Beauty



SCARLET TANAGER

Monograph Number Four in The Mentor Reading Course



HIP-BANG!" The emphatic note comes from the cool oak shade. There is the author among the new leaves, in a dress as pronounced as his call, an atom from the far tropics drifted back to us on the wings of May, with his gorgeous new suit of scarlet trimmed with pure black wings and tail. What a contrast—scarlet against the new green and deep blue sky! It takes sharp eyes to discover this gallant's humble mate in her dress of dull green; but at last we find her, sitting quietly, apparently absorbed in admiration of him, or perhaps speculating upon which branch to place the frail nest.

Sometimes a tree in an abandoned orchard is selected; but more frequently the site is chosen in the deep wood. A couple of weeks after the delicately speckled greenish-blue eggs are laid the young appear, and in the strenuous care of a family both parents find little time for anything else. When the youngsters are able to care for themselves the father slips away out of sight, and we are tempted to think he has started on the return journey southward. But he is only changing his nuptial coat for one of green. During this transition he assumes a remarkably dapper effect of green and red patches, due to the scarlet feathers being supplanted by the traveling dress, and if we look through his favorite haunts in the late August or early September days we shall find him dressed almost exactly similar to his mate and ready for the trip to South America.

Lacking the sprightly manner of more active birds and possessing slight vocal ability, the tanager is seldom noticed, and is often considered rare in localities where he is really common. He is particularly partial to oak woods, and spends hours hunting industriously a certain small worm found among the young oak leaves. At other times he sits quietly on a branch in an absorbed sort of way, and, taken all in all, is modest, unassuming, and minds his own business. Indeed, he is so preoccupied at times as to allow a very near approach without taking alarm. These birds are very susceptible to cold, and are sometimes so benumbed by a sudden drop in temperature as to permit their being taken in the hand without resistance.

The tanagers are increasing in number, and the fact that the male makes the journey south in a protective dress unquestionably is one of Nature's methods of preserving the species. While Nature strives to keep alive, man steps in and destroys. Every year the numerous lighthouses along the coast collect their toll of migrating birds, and not long ago hundreds of tanagers were killed against Fire Island lighthouse.





American Birds of Beauty



WOOD DUCK

Monograph Number Five in The Mentor Reading Course



UCKS are associated in our minds with broad reaches of meadow or the open sea. They love the wide spaces of the earth, sweeping across the sky in long lines or converging into V-shaped flocks. This rising and falling sinuous line seems as much a part of the early morning on the marshes as the reflected light in the little reed-encircled ponds. The wood duck differs radically, not only in plumage, but in habit, from the rest of the ducks. Instead of seeking for him among his brothers in the sedge, we find the resplendent fellow among the woodland streams and lakes.

Not many miles from New York City there is a little sheet of water tucked snugly away among the hills. Here for years, when the golden club reared its yellow crown above the water, a pair of those exquisite birds could be found resting and feeding after the long journey from the south. They nested in an old sycamore overhanging the water, and nearly every year succeeded in rearing a full brood. An interesting sight it was when the old lady escorted the youngsters to the water. Not in a carefully padded baby carriage with soft quilts and downy pillows! Each tiny yellow ball of fuzz was taken gently by the back of the neck and dropped exactly eleven feet into the water with a splash. The fall did not seem to hurt the little chaps a particle. Indeed, they seemed to enjoy it, and a more practical illustration of "ducks taking to water" one would have to go a long way to see. When all were down, they were rounded up, and their education began. It was wonderful to see how quickly they responded and how soon they started in to forage for food on their own account.

And then there came a spring when they did not return, and one of the charms of the lake disappeared. They had fallen before the gun of the hunter.

PREPARED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE MENTOR ASSOCIATION
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American Birds of Beauty



SNOWY HERON

Monograph Number Six in The Mentor Reading Course



IN former years a journey to Florida meant, among other things, a sight of thousands of snowy herons. A trip down any of the rivers on one of the little stern-wheelers was sure to reveal hundreds; but he is fortunate indeed who sees half a dozen of these immaculate birds in a whole season there now. Along the upper reaches of the St. John and its tributaries they nested in thousands, filling the air when distributed, like some enormous white cloud. In those days they did not confine themselves to tropical regions, but wandered as far north as Maine. On Long Island the gunners were well acquainted with them, and as late as 1910 a few were noted in South Carolina.

These dainty birds of the South fall without the pale of protective coloration. Against the dark green of mangroves or cypress their snow-white forms stand out like cameos. Deep in the interior of the Everglades a handful of the once powerful Seminole Indians are making their last stand. In these same wilds the last of the snowy herons are struggling against extinction at the hands of the plume-hunters. They are gradually disappearing. Often they are shot from nests that frequently contain four or five young who die a lingering death by starvation.

The National Association of Audubon Societies has accomplished wonders in protecting the snowy heron and other birds. The setting aside of reservations on government land by executive order, where the feathered inhabitants can find sanctuary, has saved more than one species from annihilation.

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